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ABSTRACT

A free mind is the first step in the pursuit of liberty, but African Americans have been hampered in that pursuit by both the Eurocentric dominant culture and by the lack of consensus among blacks on the nature and goals of black education. Conflicting trends in the history of black education include the following: (1) opposing Eurocentric and Afrocentric definitions of the goals of black education; (2) attempts by European Americans to obliterate the African spirit and control the African American mind; (3) beginnings of an African American alternative vision of black education that goes beyond the non-academic, Eurocentric model; and (4) renewed efforts by some educators to reassert the Eurocentric educational tradition while others attempt to expand the earlier search for an African frame of reference. European Americans must examine the diverse history and cultural traditions that comprise the multicultural American identity, and acknowledge the contribution of African culture to the curriculum at all levels of education. African Americans must study the role of African culture in contemporary life, and establish Afrocentric criteria for scientifically measuring and evaluating academic excellence. A list of references is included. (FMW)

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Freedom of the Mind

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Essays on Liberty

This is one of several of essays and policy studies intended for policymakers, researchers, teachers, administrators, parents, students and others who are interested in the education of African-American, Hispanic-American, American-Indian and Asian-American youth.

The entire series of essays and policy studies explores the cultural roots and historical legacies of these various groups. It probes what it means to be independent and to enjoy that liberty. It discusses the general context of learning in schools of all types, and it lays the foundation for determining what must be done to enhance education in America. It is designed to stimulate readers to consider why independent schools are important and what role they should have in America's educational system.

JOAN DAVIS RATTERAY, Ph.D., is President of the Institute for Independent Education, Inc.

COVER: Excerpt from a chart developed in 1700 by Edmund Halley, the English astronomer and geographer. It was used by navigators on ships bringing Africans to the Americas. *(Source: U.S. Library of Congress)*

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Freedom of the Mind

Joan Davis Ratteray

The pursuit of liberty has been a constant and soul-wrenching experience for African Americans. It has been constant because ever since the days of slavery, many African Americans have resisted being forced into a social order that is dominated almost exclusively by European traditions. This foreign context did not accommodate African customs, traditions or the need to recognize a landbase for African-American culture. Nor could it for over 240 years find any moral justification for African liberty. The pursuit has been soul-wrenching because African Americans as a group have not been able to agree on a uniform approach.

Many people accept the idea that creating conditions necessary for having a free mind is the first step toward liberty. As African Americans have moved in this direction, their experience has been shaped by four conflicting trends:

First, by defining liberty in voices that have not always been harmonious, European Americans and African Americans have promoted conflicting goals for education, unable to decide to what end African Americans should be educated;

Second, the paths to liberty that African Americans have taken were frequently obstructed by attempts to obliterate the African spirit and control the African-American mind;

Third, African Americans began to develop an alternative vision for their education which went beyond the non-academic and exclusively Eurocentric boundaries that had been established for them by others; and

Fourth, there are renewed efforts by some educators to reassert the Eurocentric tradition in education, while others are expanding the earlier search for an African frame of reference.

The existence of these four trends has created an atmosphere of persistent tension, the resolution of which may mean that America must adopt a new definition of liberty.

I: Defining Liberty

Mainstream America relies heavily on definitions of liberty as set forth by the statesmen who founded the Nation and by the structures of the educational institutions they created. Their definitions, however, stand in counterpoint to the views of those who were the Founding Fathers of African-America.

America's European founders proclaimed the doctrine of liberty for all, but their fervor was marred by Thomas Jefferson who, in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, used the most pejorative of terms to describe Africans in America and provided a rationale for depriving them of liberty. Then there was imagery promoted by John Jay, who helped start the African Free School in New York but who, in the *Federalist Papers*, could not see beyond the blood, languages, religions, manners and customs of Europe. At the home of George Washington in Mount Vernon, Virginia, there is physical evidence that Africans were then, and are today, considered to be worthy of only an obscure footnote in history.

African Americans were not originally included in the European-American definition of liberty, nor was their status as slaves made permanent by the Constitution. Neither Whites nor Blacks knew for certain how Africans in the Americas related to the concept of freedom. In spite of the Emancipation Proclamation and the Fourteenth Amendment, African Americans today still search for freedom of the mind.

European Americans created this Nation because they wanted to escape from a government that denied them liberty. They and their descendants, however, soon began their own assault upon liberty by creating the common school. Waving the flag of egalitarianism, educational innovators created a system they intended to be dominated by the values of northern Europe. They built common schools on a narrow vision of individual possibilities, calculated to strip people of their cultural and ethnic differences and make them clones of the mainstream mold. It was tantamount to saying, "Be all that you can be, as long as what you want to be is what I am."

The system worked well for northern Europeans who had similar starting points, but southern Europeans objected to being forced into this mold. The system then adjusted to their differences.

In spite of attempts by European-Americans to monopolize the discussion of liberty and its applications to education, African-American "Founding Fathers" took a different approach. Realizing that mainstream Boston of 1792 would neither respect Africans in America nor send them back to Africa, Prince Hall, a free African and veteran of the Revolutionary War, promoted education as the road to liberty. He urged his fellow Africans to lay aside "recreations and all supperfluities so that we may have that money to educate our rising generation..." (Wesley, 1983). When the City of Boston refused to extend education to African children, he started in his son's home in 1798 one of the first independent schools for African Americans.

Other community and religious leaders also created their own schools and provided the beginnings of an institutional infrastructure that nurtured free spirits among African Americans. Leaders such as Richard Allen, founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, as well as other Methodists and Baptists, started schools to assert their cultural identity and define their own reality.

Thus, the two definitions of liberty, as adopted by European Americans and by African Americans, were not in harmony from the beginning, and they have continued to grow apart. These philosophical differences then became the basis for further tensions between the two groups.

II: Obliterating the Spirit of Africans

There have been many attempts over the years to obliterate the African spirit and make the children of Africa acceptable to the American mainstream. These have included the imposition of strict discipline, restricting the content of education that Africans received, and separating them psychologically and physically from the core of mainstream learning.

The Power of Discipline

The imposition of stringent discipline was one of the first strategies to control the African mind, emerging in a system of pedagogical techniques known as Lancasterian education (Lancaster, 1821). While it was borrowed from the upper classes in England, it was implemented in the United States for the specific purpose of educating the poor.

Lancasterian education was regarded as extremely successful because no one who had been taught under the system had been convicted of a crime. Using this approach, it was possible to teach large numbers of students and maintain a low per-pupil cost. It provided strict punishment, rewards and peer rivalry. Its military-style regimentation was considered to be particularly helpful to mainstream America because it guaranteed that Blacks would not disrupt or destroy the socializing function of American educational institutions. Thus it became politically acceptable to offer Blacks the opportunity to acquire an education.

The African Free School in New York during the 1790s was among the more prominent examples of schools using the Lancasterian system. Another was Clarkson Institute, sponsored by the Abolition Society in Philadelphia during the early 1830s. Clarkson, however, did attempt to teach scientific subjects, such as eclipses, the moon and its connection with the tides, geology, elasticity of bodies, muscles, and so on (Silcox, Undated). They found that the Lancasterian system improved the general operation of the school.

Control over Content

There was a second and more insidious strategy that also had the effect of obliterating the African spirit. It went beyond pedagogy, allowing European Americans to control the content of education and make Blacks acceptable to the mainstream. This strategy surfaced among nineteenth century missionaries and intensified with the creation of manual labor schools and industrial education.

In the mid-nineteenth century, religious missionaries often used their curricula and materials in an early attempt at mind control, teaching Blacks with texts that were devoid of abstract concepts like freedom, democracy or equality, such as appeared in texts for Whites. Instead, they emphasized practical information for survival and presented stories that stressed piety and portrayed Blacks as submissive followers who passively accepted their circumstances in life (Butchart, 1980). Strong objections were raised by the American Freedmen's Union Commission, charging that separate texts meant inferior texts.

Another aspect of the debate over content concerns manual labor schools and their progeny, industrial education schools. African Americans have been so closely linked to laboring without

access to profits that some people regarded manual labor schools as impediments rather than as precursors to freedom. The Negro Convention, which was started by Richard Allen, met in 1831 to discuss the development of these institutions. They flowered briefly but did not have any real support from rank and file free men in the North (Woodson, 1915).

The idea of manual labor schools resurfaced when Fanny Jackson Coppin became principal of the Institute for Colored Youth in the 1880s. Unfortunately, Coppin attempted to move industrial education to a higher level, preparing Blacks for skilled trades by offering advanced technical education and by stressing creativity and invention (Franklin, 1979). Although she had a waiting list of over 300 students, her Quaker board of directors had other ideas about what was an appropriate education for Blacks. They made it impossible for her to sustain her vision for urban education by moving her school to a rural area where the notion of advanced technical education could not survive (Silcox, 1977).

Booker T. Washington made industrial training the centerpiece of education for Blacks in the South, defining it as carpentry, dressmaking, cooking, housekeeping, upholstery, cobbing, caring, waiting, tailoring and applied electricity (Washington, 1902). However, this was a lower standard than applied to Whites, whose industrial education eventually trained them for positions that utilized the new technologies of the day, such as electrical and mechanical engineers, assembly line workers and other manufacturing jobs. Washington's tireless efforts made it possible for Whites in the South to accept the idea of being surrounded by "educated" Blacks. Thus, he created a transition stage between having manual labor schools or no education at all on the one hand, and a subsequent movement toward an academic education for the masses on the other hand.

Physical and Psychological Separation

The third attack on the spirit of African Americans came in the form of physical and psychological separation from mainstream knowledge.

The 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* ended the legal separation of African Americans and raised the possibility that the masses would gain access to the mainstream. As large numbers of African Americans entered

desegregated government schools, many independent institutions, created by Blacks for Blacks, were closed. Ties that had been lovingly and painstakingly built between independent schools and their communities were broken, and the people who were left behind were forced to rebuild their lives without a role model for self-help and independence in education. This tragedy, like the frequent burning down of schools in the South and North during earlier times, symbolizes an important part of the African-American experience: continually starting over.

The psychological separation of African Americans from the mainstream became more entrenched after the *Brown* decision. One of the most respected leaders in American education in the middle of the twentieth century was James B. Conant, then President of Harvard University. He wrote glowingly of the Anglo-Saxon heritage of American education and enthusiastically supported the idea that there should be equality of educational opportunity for *all* people (Conant, 1953). Eight years later, in a controversial book entitled *Slums and Suburbs* (Conant, 1961), he rejected the possibility of equality in educational opportunity for those who live in the slums, but he recommended that additional money be spent on "all-Negro schools" to produce "satisfactory education" (Clark, 1967).

The views of this influential educator effectively lowered expectations for academic achievement among urban youth. He helped legitimize for decades to come the attempts of education researchers and policymakers to label the disadvantaged, "prove" deficiencies in abilities, and justify the use of texts, materials and pedagogy that were lesser than those used by mainstream youth. This type of research, which was based on lowered expectations, affected primarily African-American urban youth. It was heavily financed by government and philanthropy between 1961 and 1968, the era known as the Great Society, and this way of thinking continues to be widespread twenty years later.

Unable to deal with the African spirit and African styles of cognition among their students, European-American educators began giving these children pejorative labels like "disadvantaged" and "learning disabled." Statistics indicate that a disproportionate number of African-American youth bear the stigma of these labels (National Coalition, 1987). For example, Blacks are only 16 percent of the total enrollment in elementary and secondary schools, 37 percent of the "educable mentally retarded," 26

percent of the "trainable mentally retarded" and 23 percent of the "seriously emotionally disturbed." Large numbers of African-American children today are physically segregated from mainstream classes in their schools and placed in remedial courses from which most of them never recover academically.

III: An Alternative Vision

Early in this century, with considerable debt to the positions taken by people like Fanny Jackson Coppin and Booker T. Washington, African Americans began developing an alternative vision of what should be included in the content of education for African Americans. This vision emerged as educators who owned and operated some of the first twentieth-century schools began to shift toward an academic curriculum. On a separate track, there were historians and activist educators who began promoting an African orientation in the curriculum as the basis for developing an independent African-American mind.

The Academic Movement

Strong women like Charlotte Hawkins Brown and Nannie Helen Burroughs wanted to highlight the academic, rather than merely industrial, preparation of African Americans, but they met with considerable resistance from their White supporters.

Charlotte Hawkins Brown began Palmer Memorial Institute in 1902, in Sedalia, North Carolina, and started developing the school toward her goal of having a college preparatory institute. Unfortunately, White benefactors, such as The Sedalia Club in Cambridge, Massachusetts, insisted that the school be described as providing an "industrial education" (Brown papers). The only way she could raise funds for her institution was to accede to their requirement.

When she eventually reactivated her dream of starting a junior college department to enhance the college preparatory aspects of her school, she lost major support from the American Missionary Association, and her junior department closed five years later. Brown died in 1953. When Palmer Memorial Institute closed in 1971, it became one of the countless self-help institutions that withered and collapsed because African Americans decided they needed to attend newly-desegregated government schools in order to have a quality education.

In 1909, Nannie Helen Burroughs founded the National Training School for Women and Girls, now known as the Nannie Helen Burroughs School, located in Washington, D.C. She began to raise education from an industrial to a professional level with courses that included not only the trades but also business and secretarial training, beauty culture, Christian social services, a program for economic security known as cooperatives, home-making and public speaking (Burroughs papers).

Burroughs also had difficulty getting funding, even though she emphasized industrial and domestic service. Nevertheless, she felt strongly that leadership came through hard work and continually challenged people who said they believed in "helping people who help themselves." Her school had considerable support from the Women's Auxiliary of the National Baptist Convention, the African-American community in general, and from individual leaders such as Mary McLeod Bethune, Booker T. Washington, Father Divine, and Madame C. J. Walker.

Introducing African History

The historians and activist educators who defended the study of African history in the curriculum have included people like Arthur Schomburg, W. E. B. DuBois, Drusilla Dunjee Houston, Carter G. Woodson, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, and Marcus Garvey.

Arthur Schomburg pointed out in 1913 that there was enough known about the contributions of Negroes to justify having "a chair of Negro history" (Schomburg, 1913). In his address to a summer class of teachers at Cheyney Institute, formerly known as the Institute for Colored Youth, he gave examples of achievements in many areas and urged African Americans to support a scholar who could "give us the background for our future."

W. E. B. DuBois, whose extensive writings stretched from 1896 to 1961, analyzed the conditions of education for African Americans and wrote that the "leading motif" or guiding force in developing African Americans and their leaders is an understanding of cultural life (DuBois, 1973a). This includes a knowledge of African history and social development, as well as the history of Africans in the Americas (DuBois, 1973b). Toward the end of his life, he said that we must ask ourselves the following questions:

> [W]hen we become equal American citizens what will be our aim and ideals and what will we have to do with selecting these aims and ideals. Are we to assume that we will simply adopt the ideals of Americans and become what they are or want to be and that we will have in this process no ideals of our own? (DuBois, 1973c)

In 1926, Drusilla Dunjee Houston, one of many self-trained historians who have helped unearth the story of an African past for her people, published the first volume in a history of ancient Africa. Although she was unable to complete the remaining volumes before her death, she did establish herself as an authority on the subject (Coates, 1985), and her work continues to inspire and influence many African-American thinkers.

Carter G. Woodson, a scholar and prolific author, dedicated his life to making African Americans more aware of their history. He contended that many Negroes who presented themselves as educated were in fact "mis-educated" because they had been taught to admire the achievements of their oppressors and to feel contempt for their own people (Woodson, 1933). "To educate the Negro," he continued, "we must find out exactly what his background is, what he is today, what his possibilities are, and how to begin with him as he is and make him a better individual of the kind that he is." Woodson also noted that Black history is as important to African Americans as the histories of Europe and Asia are to people from those areas. He associated the study of history with freedom when he declared that we must use history "to build a future in which [Blacks] can become true Americans in our nation dedicated to the concepts of freedom and unity without reference to race, creed or color" (Woodson, 1972).

The Honorable Elijah Muhammad began the first Muslim independent school in 1932 in Detroit and the second one two years later in Chicago. Later known as the University of Islam, this institution was an adult education institution that grew out of a distrust of conventional educational institutions that Muhammad believed was "designed by the slavemaster...to keep the Negro in his place" (Essien-Udom, 1962). He proposed that a curriculum should go beyond reading, writing and arithmetic and include, among other things, "the history of the black nation." The purpose of education should be to encourage the Negro "to think for himself, to inquire into his past, to be proud of his heritage prior to slavery, and to have a desire to become independent economically or otherwise."

Marcus Garvey was one of the few early leaders who actually focused on developing an Afrocentric curriculum. His "Course of African Philosophy" was used in the schools he started, including Liberty University in Claremont, Virginia (Martin, 1985). This course was a how-to manual, showing his followers how to conduct themselves as advocates and articulate spokesmen for their cause, how to strengthen their character and their faith in God and man, and how to relate to the existing political and economic institutions in society. All of these techniques for personal development were to be used to develop the Black race, because ultimately, "for Africa we win."

The African-American alternative vision gained momentum in the wake of the debate over "community control" in public schools in the late 1960s. Parents in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville area in New York City demanded that they have control over schools in the community. However, the New York Board of Education aborted this effort by shifting the focus to "community involvement" (New York Civil Liberties Union, 1969). Some of these parents and other parents across the country began opening independent schools in which they could have control over the education of their children (Afrik, 1981). A group these parents met in 1972 and formed CIBI, the Council of Independent Black Institutions (Doughty, 1973). Today, CIBI is a support organization for many of these independent institutions, stressing a blend of "quality academic preparation with an Afrocentric cultural and historical context" (Ratteray and Shujaa, 1987).

IV: New Educational Movements

African-American protests against the obliteration of the African spirit gained in popularity, especially the trend toward an Afrocentric curriculum that crystallized in the 1960s. This, in turn has led to two contemporary educational movements. One is a reassertion by European Americans of a Eurocentric focus in American education. The other is a counter movement by African Americans, in part to defend the legitimacy of an Afrocentric frame of reference and in part to continue the earlier development of a scholarly basis for establishing the parameters and detailed content of such a curriculum.

Eurocentricity Reasserted

An impressive array of scholars in the past few years supports the notion of a European hegemony in defining excellence in American education. They do so by stressing the moral superiority of Western civilization and championing Western values as the primary components of an American curriculum.

First, there was a political movement to assert the notion of "cultural conservatism" (Lind, 1986). Within a few months, policymakers in the Federal Government, such as Finn (1986), joined in support, calling for a renewed study of the Western intellectual tradition. William J. Bennett, former U.S. Secretary of Education, then launched a three-pronged offensive in defense of the West, as follows:

- He issued an "ideal" curriculum for secondary schools, which could restore the European foundations of Western thought to the pedestals they formerly occupied (Bennett, 1987).
- At Stanford, a leading university, he spoke out against the faculty who wanted to change a required course in Western culture, making it a program that included writers from non-European ethnic and cultural groups, as well as women writers (Bennett, 1988a).
- He issued his "ideal" curriculum for America's elementary schools, following in the same vein as his earlier publication (Bennett, 1988b).

Bennett and Finn contend that the West gave the world its standards of excellence and introduced the concept of equality. Bennett in particular implied, by his omissions in the context in which he wrote and spoke, that similar contributions of equal value have not been made by ancient Africa or by any other civilization.

Two authors in the academic community also gave their support (Hirsch, 1987; Bloom, 1987). In *Cultural Literacy*, Hirsch defined what "every American needs to know." His ostensibly simple thesis was that there should be a body of common knowledge shared by all Americans. Unfortunately, it was overshadowed by the political implications of the exclusionary list of items he recommended; he virtually eliminated the possibility of studying history and culture from anything other than a Eurocentric perspective.

In *The Closing of the American Mind*, Bloom carried the argument one step further. He specifically denounced the efforts of African Americans and others who, in the 1960s and 1970s, had begun to attack the cultural exclusion that was so rampant in America's formal citadels of learning. He seemed to have forgotten that America grew out of a revolt against the principle of exclusion. He also forgot that African-American participation in this original revolt was part of a search for liberty that was revitalized in the 1960s.

The Reaffirmation of Africa

Educators in both public and independent schools realize that it has not been in the intellectual tradition of European Americans to consider African contributions to civilization as significant, or to identify an African frame of reference for examining knowledge. In fact, scholars like Edwin J. Nichols (1986) have insisted for some time that African-American children may be experiencing learning difficulties because they are being thrust into a system built almost exclusively upon Eurocentric constructs. Therefore, growing numbers of researchers, school administrators, teachers and parents, primarily African Americans, are mounting a counter-attack on what has been a pervasive diminution of the African presence in the education of the American mind.

Several public school systems across the country recently confronted the issue of building an African perspective into the curriculum. In 1985 and 1986, the Multnomah School District of Portland, Oregon, produced several monographs that explained African and African-American traditions in social studies (Clarke, 1985), science and technology (Adams, 1986), language arts (J. Harris, 1986), art (M. Harris, 1986), and mathematics (Lumpkin, 1986).

In New York, a discussion of Afrocentricity in learning styles was highlighted when the Board of Regents published a booklet and subsequently held a conference to discuss the idea that cultural heritage may be an important factor in learning and that the teaching of African-American children could be enhanced if teachers were more aware of differences in learning styles (Rimer, 1988). Angry voices, both inside and outside the teaching profession, focused not so much on the accuracy of the theory as on the fear, recriminations, chaos and policy implications that might flow from acknowledging that point of view as fact.

A recommendation was also made to the superintendent of schools in Washington, D.C., that African concepts be incorporated into the school system and that a consultant should conduct workshops for teachers on the study of African culture, education, history and languages (Barras, 1988). While the superintendent said that he supported the project, it has not yet been implemented.

The school board in the City of Camden, New Jersey, agreed unanimously that its goals for 1989 would include the introduction of an Afrocentric curriculum in all courses. The proposal was made by Dr. Molefi Asante, chairman of the African-American Studies Department at Temple University, who said it would help remove "clouds of inferiority from the mental skies of black children" (Ott, 1988).

Over 260 universities now offer programs in "Black studies," "Afro-American Studies" or "African studies." Temple University, located in Philadelphia, has the only doctoral program in the discipline, but each of these institutions is working toward the development of a scholarly basis for examining the African-American experience in light of an African past. Unfortunately and ironically, only 20 percent of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are among this number.

There are also independent elementary and secondary schools that have made some progress in implementing an Afrocentric perspective for the curriculum (Ratteray and Shujaa, 1987). This movement is spearheaded by parents who have said that one of the reasons they chose these schools for their children was to provide an environment in which the cultural background of the child is affirmed.

Conclusion

America's search for the meaning of liberty, which has been neither thorough nor comprehensive, is woven throughout with apparently inextricable racial factors. However, when European Americans and many African Americans are confronted with the issue of a continuing search for liberty, they tend to discuss only the universality of the human experience. In addition, Whites tend to see themselves and their Eurocentric value system as mirrors of the true American mind, not as one of its several components that may embody fundamental differences

in perceptions of liberty. An appropriate search for liberty, therefore, must involve a more systematic look at the history and cultural traditions of all the groups that form the American mosaic.

European Americans must be prepared to look realistically at African Americans, not thinking of them as remodeled Whites in "lesser" form. They also must reevaluate European history and fuse an enlightened view of African contributions into all areas of the curriculum at their educational institutions.

On the other hand, African Americans must study with greater intensity the people, events and traditions from their African past and understand the role of cultural continuity in contemporary life. The focus of research should be on discovering what it really means for African Americans to be educated for liberty and on establishing Afrocentric criteria for scientifically measuring and evaluating academic excellence.

We cannot rate too highly the social development and motivation of a child who has pride in his or her history. We cannot overestimate the favorable effects on achievement that come from having a sense of ownership of tradition. Finally, we cannot ignore the value of sustaining African-American institutions, for they are centers within which we can nurture ideas, develop leaders, gain experience and find our own paths to freedom. As we replace myths of inferiority with an assumption of greatness yet unexplored, let us bear in mind that freedom of the mind will lead us ultimately to liberty for all.

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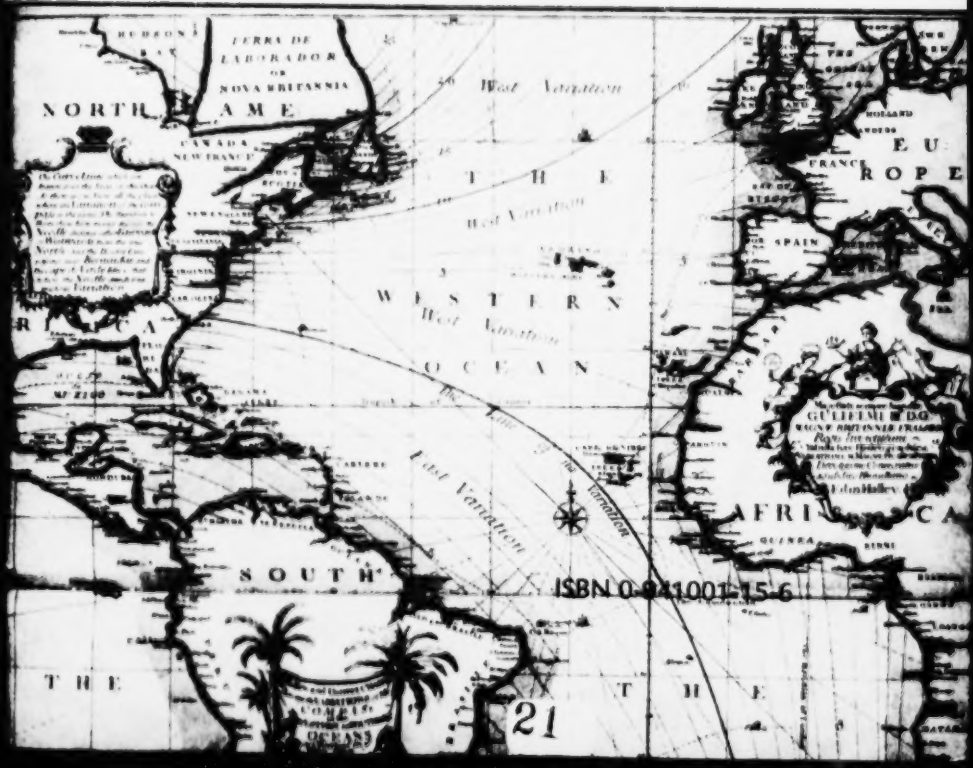

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